

The King Buzzard: Bano Qudsia's Postnational Allegory and the Nation-State

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Using Bano Qudsia's Urdu novel *Raja Gidh* as a point of departure, this essay analyzes the ambivalent role of the novel in articulating the national and postnational tendencies of the Islamic world in general and Pakistan in particular.

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Published in 1981, at the height of General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime in Pakistan, Bano Qudsia's Urdu novel *Raja Gidh* [The King Buzzard] draws on the oldest supranational myth of Islamic history: migration. The novel's philosophical message, therefore, privileges Islamic supranational affiliations over entrenched territorial nationalism. I believe it is this traditional supranational imaginary that generates, in the Islamic world, the tensions between territorial national loyalties and the supranational concept of Islamic *Ummah*. This essay attempts to tease out this hitherto neglected aspect of Islamic historical mythology within *Raja Gidh* and then apply it, albeit symptomatically, to the current national and postnational tensions within the Muslim world in general and within Pakistan in particular.

Raja Gidh contains two separate but interconnected narratives. While the main plot follows the protagonist's personal quest across a national landscape, the secondary plot, the main concern of this paper, deals with the trial of the Buzzard community at an international Conference of the Birds. Thus, by its very organization, the

trial of King Buzzard is a fantastical juxtaposition of the postnational with the national aspects of the novel's realist plot. As *Raja Gidh* has mostly been read as a nationalistic novel (it has even been included in the exam for Central Superior Services of Pakistan), it seems that a departmental reading of the novel has appropriated it in the name of the nation-state. Considering the immense popularity of the novel, in its twenty-first edition now, it is only appropriate to examine the hidden and hitherto neglected narrative of the animal world and to highlight its treatment of the postnational Islamic imaginary. This discussion of the novel, despite its reliance on the nation as narration paradigm, will attempt to complicate the metropolitan theoretical views on the importance of history and the novel in creating what Benedict Anderson calls the *imagined community*.

Almost all major theorists of nationalism consider history and historical myths as a constituent element in defining modern nations and nation-states, and quite a few of them also consider the novel as the most nationalistic form of imaginary literature. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, in explaining his concept of proto-nations, invokes the historical mythologies: "This brings us to the last, and almost certainly the most decisive criterion of proto-nationalism, *the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity*. The strongest proto-national cement known is undoubtedly to be what nineteenth-century jargon called a historical nation" (73, *emph. mine*). Similarly, Anthony D. Smith's definition of the nation incorporates the importance of history and historical myths: "A Nation can [...] be defined as a named human population sharing an *historical territory, common myths and historical memories*, a mass, public culture, common economy and legal rights and duties for all members" (140, *emph. mine*).

As Smith further develops his argument for the ethnic basis of nations, it becomes quite evident that this theory can only hold together if the participants can draw on a shared sense of history. Hence, reliance upon historical texts and myths becomes a norm in the process of defining a modern nation. The importance of historical consciousness, with a strong emphasis on popular sentiment, is evident in Ernest Renan's articulation of the nation. For him "the nation like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion." Renan's further explanation of the concept clearly emphasizes the importance of a common history in invoking what he calls the "common will in present" (19). Regardless of what approach one follows in defining the nation, history and the current popular imaginary of the nation are almost inseparable. Elie Kedourie, while explaining the rise of nativist historical rituals, suggests that "the appeal to the past, the idea that every nation is defined by its past and therefore must have a past to be defined by" (208) is necessary. It is, however, important to remember that if a strong supranational historical mythology exists, then the invocation of the past automatically becomes a two-pronged negotiation: it can invoke both the nation and the postnation.

This reliance on historical mythologies to justify the nation might seem a perfect strategy for metropolitan European nation-states, but when it is applied to the Islamic periphery, the same nation-making histories tend to complicate the idea of modern Islamic nations, and nation-states. This happens, I suggest, because Islamic history and historical mythologies are supranational, and any modern approaches to territorial nationalism are built upon an exclusion of this supranational mythology. By exclusion, I mean that the creation of most postcolonial Muslim nation-states involved an abandonment of the Muslim universal ideal of the *Ummah* for the sake of the nation-state. Abdullah al-Ahsan describes this dilemma of modern Muslim politics as follows: "In the twentieth century of the Common Era, Muslim commitment to the concept of ummah seems to have been challenged by the idea of nationalism. With the development of nationalism, and in particular the emergence of Muslim nation-states, the Muslims seem to have become somewhat confused about where their first loyalty lies—whether primary loyalty belongs to the ummah or to the nation-state" (29).

The popular view and literary representation of the *Ummah* as a concept further complicates the politics of Muslim nation-states. To most Muslims, *Ummah* is not just a theoretical concept but rather an alternate political system, for *Ummah* is "a community of law and custom" (Al-Ahsan 17). This is a distinction of extreme importance, especially within the current global context of the war on terror and the question of Islamic radicalism; most of the current Islamic radicalism is fuelled by the weakening of the nation-state as opposed to the resuscitated mythologies of the concept of the Muslim *Ummah* as a political alternative.

Historical mythologies combined with literary production are an important part of the modern articulation of nations and nation-states. Certainly, it is the will of the people and not novels that form a nation, but the novelistic mode of representation does serve as one important way of articulating a national imaginary. The novel, along with the newspaper, suggests Benedict Anderson "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (25). For Timothy Brennan, "the rise of the modern nation-state in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginative literature" (48) of which, as Brennan points out later, the novel is the most expressive form. According to both Benedict Anderson and Timothy Brennan, then, the rise of the nation-state is almost coeval with the rise of the novel. Similarly, Doris Sommer, while tracing the national imaginary of early romantic Latin American novels, suggests that "those novels [...] turn out, rather curiously, to be historical romances in whose intimate language Latin American nations are nurtured" (75).

The novel's role in articulating modern Muslim nationhood, however, is more complicated than the explanations suggested by the above theorists. In the case of South

Asian Islamic imaginative production, for example, the early novel was both national and postnational. This happened because when the novel became a respectable genre in Urdu, Muslim India was already colonized. Early Muslim novelists, therefore, while articulating a particular Muslim identity in British India, also drew upon the larger Islamic political history of the *Ummah*. Consequently, instead of merely being a national imaginary literature, the early Urdu novel also invoked the supranational Islamic heritage. The Urdu novel's stylistic precursor, the Persianized *dastaan* or epic, was inherently expansive in its scope and supranational in its plot and setting. But the early Urdu novel always drew on pan-Islamic Muslim history to define the particularities of Muslim India. The post-Independence Urdu novel on the whole, even in its modern and progressive forms, has either been haunted by the history of Islam before the national divide, or concerned with the tension between the national and the postnational. Within the historical parameters of an Islamic state, the novel, because of its inherent ambivalence, can quite easily imagine a supranational political landscape across which a Muslim subject might move freely; this is what seems to be the case in *Raja Gidh*.

Qudsia unsettles the temporal aspect of the narrative by placing her story in a bygone age, the one immediately "before the time the humans destroyed themselves" (22).¹ The Conference of the Birds opens with the following declaration: "This story is of the specific time from the first age of human civilization when humans had not yet used their bombs. There was great fear amongst the dwelling places of animals about this new human innovation. Hence, a Conference of the Birds was organized in the forest" (22–23). The Conference of the Birds, headed by the legendary *Simurgh* of the Persian *Shahname* [Epic of the Kings], seeks a solution to the impending destruction of the world at the hands of humans. The birds fly over a vast expanse of earth to reach the meeting, which Qudsia captures in the following expressive passage:

From Hind Sind came the gray-winged birds in droves. From the hills of Khasi came the red-tailed bulbul and the emerald green pigeon whose orange under-wings dazzled the eyes of the beholder. The Bajanga from Katmandu and the eagles from Tibet arrived, having camped several times during their long flight. Not only the African partridges, moorhens and nightingales made their way to the meeting, but even the birds of prey suspended their activities and flew from America and Australia to the meeting place. Even the Shikra, Baz, and eagles, residents of Central Asia and Russian Turkistan, reached the meeting in the company of the birds of Pamir. [...] From the basin of River Gagahr and Chatranji came the latoras, chandols and goghais flying magnificently in battle formations like the fighter planes. (23)

This international array of birds, for which territorial borders do not matter at all, is an ingenious allegorization of the concept of the Muslim *Ummah*, or *Darul Islam*. In fact, this gathering is a perfect allegorization of what Muhammad Iqbal calls the world

of Muslims: "Ours is China and Arabia, ours is Hindustan/ For we are Muslims and the whole world is our country" (159, trans. mine). This concept of Islamic nationhood is defined quite clearly by Abul-Aala Maududi in his *Islami Riasat* [The Islamic State]: "The basis of this [Islamic] nation was neither material nor territorial, but spiritual. It offered humans a natural truth called Islam. Accordingly, obedience of God, cleanliness of the heart, nobility of action and piety were its offerings for the whole human race. And then it declared that those who accept these terms are one nation—Muslims—and those who do not are the other—non-Muslims" (240, trans. mine).

As is pretty obvious from this definition, the traditional view of the nation in Islam is supranational and ex-territorial, and it is this aspect of Islamic nationhood that the Conference of the Birds seems to highlight. In such a view of the nation, territorial origin alone cannot articulate a Muslim's freedom of movement. The *Ummah*, besides being a concept, is also based on a geographical delineation of Muslim territories. Therefore, a Muslim identity should be passport enough for a Muslim to move throughout this landscape. This is how the spiritual comes to define the political. It is also this aspect of nationalism that contested the Muslim nationalist vision during the Pakistani freedom movement and that still challenges the departmental doctrine of nationhood in Pakistan and in other Muslim countries. Hence, Qudsiya, in arranging this Conference of the Birds, is invoking the very myth of Muslim nationhood—its expanse and its refusal to be strictly territorialized—within the allegorized trial of the King Buzzard.

Ummah is not only an abstract concept; in fact, in Indian Muslim mythology, *Ummah* is believed to have existed until the very day Mustafa Kemal abolished the Ottoman Caliphate. The first political organization by the Indian Muslims, the *Khilafat* Conference, was a Muslim popular movement launched to save the *Khilafat* and to stop dismemberment of Turkey after the First World War. In fact, the leaders of the *Khilafat* Conference issued a declaration that asked Indian Muslim soldiers not to "serve in the British army, and to discourage others from enrolling in the army." This declaration was passed because of fears that the Muslim soldiers would be ordered by their British officers to "fire on their Turkish brothers" (Azad 54, trans. mine).

As Maududi's definition of the Muslim nation suggests, *Ummah* cannot be contained within territorial, ethnic, or linguistic borders; it is rather a state of being based on a certain aspect of the spiritual rather than the temporal, and its only practice of inclusion requires a belief in Islam as the final religion of God. What complicates the modern negotiation of nation in the Islamic periphery is that this now abstract concept did exist as a reality in the living history of the Muslim world. Richard Eaton, while describing the expanse of Ibn-e-Batuta's travels explains this political landscape: "Ibn Batuta, in his intercontinental wanderings, moved through a single cultural uni-

verse in which he was utterly at home. Most of his travels took place within what Muslims have always called *Dar al-Islam*, the 'abode of Islam'; that is, the inhabited earth where Muslims predominated, or failing that, where Muslim authorities were in power and could uphold the Shari'a. [...] Overall his book conveys a self-assured tone in which the cultural unity of *Dar al-Islam*, from Spain to China, was not even an issue; it was simply taken for granted" (44–45). This description of the Muslim *Ummah* certainly has geographical limits. But the ability of a Muslim to move freely across this vast territory privileges the idea of a pan-Islamic vision over the nation-state. Keeping this imaginary of *Ummah* intact has been a part of traditional Muslim scholarship and imaginative literature. In fact, the rise of the Western idea of the modern nation-state is seen as a cause of the death of the *Ummah*. Islamic modernity is, therefore, haunted by the annihilation of *Ummah* at the hands of the territorial nation and nation-state. In this light, Qudsia's Conference of the Birds can be read as an allegorized version of *Ummah*: the gathering includes all kinds of birds from far distant lands speaking countless languages yet united under the political leadership of wise Simurgh, the figure of the caliph.

The trial mirrors the exclusionary process of nation-building, for here, the defense of the world of birds depends upon purging it of the unwanted minority of the buzzards; theorists of nationalism quite frequently discuss this aspect of nation-building. Ernest Gellner, for example, explains the practice of creating a unified high culture: "Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population" (57). Clearly, then, the trial of the buzzard community and their eventual sentence is an allegory for the imposition of nationalistic principles on postnational problems.

The buzzards are charged with madness, for the buzzard family, according to the report of a Kite "has been known to do strange things." Also, the Kite continues, "for years we have noticed that they eat to the fullest, vomit, and eat again. And in the moonlit nights, they leave the green forests and run across the arid, barren lands like sailboats running against the winds" (Qudsia 27). The birds fear that the buzzards, having caught this disease of madness from the world of humans, might pass it on to the rest of the birds. The whole trial is a sort of sacrificial ritual: the birds must expel the evil within to save their world from the same perils that threaten their human counterparts. The King Buzzard, when asked about the charge, replies, "Yes, Master. On the moonlit nights, I fall off tall, canopied trees. I lose self-control. I do not recognize my own kin. Then I wander on paths that lead nowhere" (30).

The buzzards, at the end of the first animal section of the novel, have been charged

with the crime of madness, and are considered a threat to the world body of birds. This, I believe, is the insertion of a nationalistic principle within a postnationalist allegory. Only the nation-state creates a possibility of banishing a certain group, for if the political identity is global, then there can be no outside to it. Hence, here Qudsia complicates her animal world with the problems of the human world, for after all, the so-called disease of madness, as the Kites claim, has come from the world of the humans.

Before the next meeting of the Conference of the Birds, the buzzard family discusses possible strategies of defense. In this discussion, two opposing views of political identity are explored. While the experienced Raja Gidh suggests flight, with no territorial affiliation, his younger followers are fiercely nationalistic. Here is how this conversation transpires:

Then the King Buzzard said "Think Brothers, every one in the forest is against us; there is no peace for us here. If you want my opinion, let us migrate from here. I can't explain it to you, *but someday one human will come who will teach the world the true meaning of flight.*"

"No living being can banish another from God-created universe," shouted the Yemenite Buzzard.

"Don't fight with the ones who are taking away your birth right," replied Raja Gidh, "but migrate to seek God's blessings," he beseeched.

"No, we have a right to this forest. You migrate if you want to, but you will go alone," yelled the leader of the opposition.

[...]

"Don't try to trick us. Go find us a lawyer. We cannot leave this forest," yelled all the young buzzards.

[...]

Raja Gidh laughed and said, "Now, who can make you understand that hesitance is another side of bravery; bravery isn't in asking for your rights, but rather in foregoing them." (196-98, *emph. mine*)

This is a layered conversation. First of all, it represents the contest between a nationalistic and postnationalistic consciousness. The young buzzards focus on territorial right and the need to fight for it. This is a version of what Gellner describes as the "nationalistic sentiment" (1) aroused by the violation of a political right, in this case the right to live in a national territory: the forest. But it is King Buzzard's stance that happens to be the main focus of my inquiry, for he is mobilizing the most resilient and honoured myth of Islamic history: Prophet Muhammad's *Hijra* (flight) from Mecca, the place of his birth, to the city of *Madina* to seek refuge. Flight from a land of intolerance to the one that would afford security and freedom to live according to one's beliefs is the most exalted tradition in Islamic history. Imam Bukhari, one of the leading Muslim authorities on

hadith, Prophet Muhammad's sayings, describes the prophet's *Hijra* in great detail. Here is one of his recorded sayings of the prophet about this event: "The prophet was heard saying that the value of actions depends upon intentions. He who migrates for the worldly goods [. . .] that is how his reward will be recorded. And those who perform *Hijra* for God and his prophet will be rewarded accordingly" (585, trans. mine). This particular *hadith* links *Hijra* to one's intentions and transforms it into an act of piety. Since the prophet himself migrated to Madina from Mecca, *Hijra* then becomes the *Sunnah*, tradition of the prophet, considered worthy of emulation in all interpretations of Islamic law.

As *Hijra* gets canonized in Muslim texts, *Sunnah* being one of the four sources for canonization of Islamic law and tradition, its cultural and political appropriations transform it to a duty and a right. The historical records of the prophet's life also include the possibility of a glorious return after the *Hijra*: ten years after his *Hijra*, the prophet returns triumphantly to Mecca to launch the beginning of the global Muslim *Ummah*. Shibly Naumani, famous for his detailed biography of the prophet, captures the prophet's victory speech: "There is no God but one and He has no equals. He has fulfilled the promise to his servant: henceforth all collectivities, all vendettas, and all blood feuds of the past are now under my feet, only the protection of the Kaaba and offering water to the hajjaj remains irrevoked. O people of Quresh, God has eliminated the pride of ignorance and the preference of rank. All people are from Adam and Adam was made of clay" (293, trans. mine). This is the glorious return of the prophet after ten years of exile that launches a climactic change: the old order is replaced by a new order. Hence the tradition of migration is inextricably linked with a triumphant return to change the world of the past. Similarly, all modern acts of *Hijra* are irrevocably conflated with the idea of a triumphant return, which may involve a prolonged war with the perceived enemy and also a return to the past glory of Islamic *Ummah*. The earliest so-called Wahabi uprisings against the East India Company were clearly couched in this principle. Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed, the leader of the 1830 war, "migrated from India to *Sarhad* (the North-West Frontier Province) to conduct a war on the Sikhs and British" (Mehr 277, trans. mine). His biographer, Maulana Ghulam Rasul Mehr, besides covering his campaigns, gives quite a lot of space in his biography to Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed's *Hijra* to the frontier, for Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed's *Hijra* was inextricably linked with his eventual struggles against the Sikhs and the British.

Thus, when Raja Gidh suggests the possibility of *Hijra* and mentions the "One who will come and teach the world the value of flight," he is invoking a fact of history that creates one of the most potent mythologies of early and modern Islam. Suddenly, love of one's land, and the question of rights becomes secondary, and the discussion is transformed from a matter of nationalist principle to a postnational imaginary.

Qudsia, through the character of King Buzzard, popularizes the most enduring historical myth for her nationalistic audience. *Raja Gidh* takes the reader beyond the question of nation to a historical past that existed outside the boundaries of territorial claims and rights and invokes the competing principle of Islamic politics: the myth of flight and a borderless *Darul Islam*.

This tension between nation and postnation is a part of the modern histories of almost all Muslim nation-states. During the Pakistan movement, it manifested itself in a contest between the Islamic parties and the All India Muslim League. When the League passed the Pakistan Resolution in 1940, its rivals, including *Jamiyat-e-Ulama-e-Hind*, who were fiercely opposed to the division of India, passed the following resolution: "India will have geographical and political boundaries of an individual whole and as such is the common homeland of all the citizens irrespective of race or religion who are joint owners of its resources. All nooks and corners of the country are hearths and homes of Muslims who cherish the historic eminence of their religion and culture, which are dearer to them than their lives. From the national point of view every Muslim is an Indian" (Faruqi 97). Surprisingly obvious in this declaration is the expanse of *Ulama's* [religious scholars'] vision as opposed to that of their secular counterparts. *Ulama* could have such different views because they emphasized the supranational element of Islamic identity and could not conceive of a Muslim nation based on specific territory. They were, therefore, quite capable of imagining a Muslim nation that co-existed with its non-Muslim citizens if necessary safeguards were provided for the Muslim way of life. Thus, what the League saw as a nationalistic opportunity—the creation of Pakistan—the *Jamiyat* saw it as an act of dividing the Muslims of India. One could of course call this particular stance of *Jamiyat* nationalistic, for they were speaking about the Muslims of India. But it is important to note that *Ummah* does not aim to eliminate the particular local identities, but ensures that, despite these local particularities, Muslims should be able to move across the *Darul Islam* freely as citizens of the global Muslim universal. For *Ulama* of India, creating a separate nation-state for the Muslims of India was likely to hinder this freedom of movement.

Quite a few Muslim scholars have commented about this divisive role of the nation-state, which, in their views, divides the Muslim world into geographically determined nations. Muhammad Iqbal, although he later supported the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims of India, explains this problem of *watan* (modern nation-state), as follows:

Watan is the biggest of these new gods, and
 Its tunic is the burial shroud of religion.
 This idol created by the new civilization
 Is the destroyer of the house of Muhammad.

Your hand is made strong by faith in God,
 Islam is your nation, for you are a follower of Mustafa.
 Display this hidden heritage to the world,
 And smash this idol into dust. (160, trans. mine)

Iqbal's verses form a basis for what Maududi describes in prose in the passage I cited earlier. Both in religious texts as well as in the Muslim imaginative literature, the territorial nation-state is seen as a threat to the larger entity of *Ummah*, especially when the nation-state becomes a venerated symbol of secular nationalistic mythologies. How do all these theoretical explanations and historical instances relate to Bano Qudsia's novel? To establish this connection, I will now turn to the concept of the sociality of literary production as explained by Edward Said.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said suggests: "We must [...] read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented [...] in such works" (66). Said is urging us to read the texts within their larger sociopolitical structures of production. If we employ this approach, Qudsia's allegory of Raja Gidh cannot only be read as an interesting subtext that lends a realist novel its fantastical counterpoint. Rather, the secondary plot highlights a message larger than the nationalistic representation contained in the main plot. To understand the importance of this aspect of Qudsia's novel, it is vital to place this work within the specifics of Pakistani history at the time of the novel's production.

The novel was published in 1981, at the height of the Soviet-Afghan war, at a time the term Afghan *Mujahideen*, surprisingly, was accorded the same degree of reverence in the West as in the Islamic East. The Afghan jihad of the eighties was the beginning of the concretization of a global Muslim solidarity, *Ummah*, in a fight against a common threat, the Soviets. According to Amnesty International, "during the time of the Soviet occupation, over six million people fled the country" (Amnesty 1), most of them to Pakistan and Iran. While the Afghans fled their country to find safe abodes in Pakistan and Iran, the war also caused a global gathering of willing warriors of Islam, for whom Pakistan became the staging point to enter the *darul-harb*, the abode of war. Hence, ironically, the first practical manifestation of a modern global Muslim alliance, an alliance that was postnational and in which people could move freely from one country to another—needing only a Muslim identity—was made possible by the combined resources of the West and Islamic East. The gathering of the *Mujahideen* in Pakistan, while strictly reminiscent of Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed, was also the first

modern gathering of Muslim men that manifested in reality the possibility of a global Muslim alliance, a new myth of the Islamic *Ummah*. The Afghan jihad thus provided the popular model of modern *Ummah* that I will discuss later.

The 1980s were also the time when the global economy, having been altered by the introduction of neoliberal economics, saw the death of the welfare state. The welfare state model had never really been fully emulated in Pakistan, but it was, at least rhetorically, a working model for legitimating the nation-state. I am relying here on Achille Mbembe's explanation of this process of legitimation in the African context. In explaining the role of salary in legitimating the African states Mbembe opines: "Since enjoyment of salary was almost always of moment to more than the individual who earned it, the salary as an institution was an essential cog in the dynamic of relations between state and society. It acted as a resource the state could use to buy obedience and gratitude and to break the population to habits of discipline. The salary was what legitimated not only subjection but also the constitution of a type of political exchange based [...] on the existence of *claims through which the state created debts on society*" (45). With the neoliberal restructuring of postcolonial economies, the states lost this, and many other, important means of legitimation. While in the African context this caused the privatization of means of violence in the hands of warlords, the loss of means of state legitimation has certainly affected Pakistan as well. Hence, exactly as the Pakistani nation-state rolled back its redemptive and welfare functions and moved toward a neoliberal restructuring, Islamist groups came forward to supplant the nation-state with the promise of social welfare, the redistribution of wealth, and a rearticulation of *Ummah*. It is in this briefly summed up politico-historical scenario that *Raja Gidh* was produced. What Qudsia includes in the subplot of her novel is not only an allegorization of early Muslim history but is also a representation of history as it was being made at the time of the novel's production. Qudsia's novel, therefore, is presenting an alternate vision to the nation-state at the very time when this particular articulation of the pan-Islamic ideal was unfolding across the Pakistani landscape and was becoming a part of the popular imaginary.

As stated earlier, the acceptance of the nation-state was always an arbitrary choice by the secular elite of the postcolonial Islamic states. After the Afghan Jihad, *Ummah* as a competing ideology seems to have grown stronger all over the Islamic world. As in most of the cases, the Islamist groups have been forcefully excluded from the political process of their particular nation-states, they have, therefore, become more radicalized. All those volunteers who passed through Pakistan to fight their holy war in a state of exile were expecting a triumphant return. But when the war ended, their own nations were reluctant to accept them back, which pushed the transnational Muslim alliances

underground and at odds with their own territorial nation-states: These underground movements are the current popular model of transnational Muslim alliances.

In the case of Pakistan, the divisions between the Islamic and secular imaginings of the nation preceded the creation of Pakistan and have been constantly in play in Pakistani politics throughout its brief history. The current US presence in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq has further legitimated and accentuated the claims of the Islamic right; hence, in the last elections, the Islamist Political parties won two out of the four provincial governments and won an unprecedented number of seats in the national assembly. It is the invocation of a postnational ideal of *Ummah*, and the ideology of an Islamic state—as opposed to its neoliberal counterpart—that has increasingly become the political direction of most Islamic societies. As the nation-state fails in its promise of reform and social welfare—which it is incapable of providing under the current global economic climate—more and more Muslim nations are likely to turn to religion as a mode of challenging the new economic paradigm.

It is apt here to provide a brief comparison between the modern articulations of *Ummah* and its Western counterparts: cosmopolitanism and neoliberal globalization. Pheng Cheah's response to Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and postnationalism is a good starting point for finding a more practical explanation of modern cosmopolitanism. Pheng Cheah states:

In Bhabha's world, postcoloniality is the hybridity of metropolitan migrancy. Everything happens as if there are no postcolonials left in the decolonized space. With the onset of decolonization, all former colonial hybrids have become postcolonials. And it seems to keep their hybrid powers and status intact, they have had to depart for the metropolis, following on the heels of their former colonizers, to torment them and enact moral retribution by subverting their cultural identity. [...] My point here is that Bhabha's picture of contemporary globalization is virulently postnational because he pays scant attention to those postcolonials for whom postnationalism through mobility is not an alternative. (302)

Cheah's criticism of Bhabha emphasizes the local postcolonial identities as opposed to their hybrid cosmopolitan counterparts. Hence, in Cheah's view, a Bhabhian internationalism can be imagined if we erase the presence of millions of postcolonial subjects who cannot move freely to the metropolitan cultures. Bhabha's method of explaining postnationalism also depoliticizes the global interaction and places it strictly in the realm of culture. But the world, obviously, is a very political space, especially when we take into account the role of neoliberal globalization. By neoliberal globalization, I specifically refer to John Rapley's definition of a neoliberal regime:

Neoliberalism can be taken to be a fusion of neoclassical economic theory with neoclassical liberal political thought. [...] Among the tenets of neoclassical economic theory are beliefs that markets are efficient and clear; that individuals are rational utility maximizers [...] that a stable macroeconomic environment—characterized by low inflation, secure property rights, and restrained government—will attract private investment and lead to growth, and that the best way to effect this macroeconomic stability is through monetary rather than fiscal policy; *that an unfettered market will eventually disperse the fruits of growth to all its participants.* (75, *emph. mine*)

Under such a paradigm, Rapley further explains, the neoliberal globalization regime is ideal in its accumulative function: those with capital are able to multiply their capital. It is in its distributive function that this regime fails and creates its own popular resistances. It is precisely against this neoliberal impulse of the globalization regime that the new articulations of the *Ummah* take their shape.

The two particular modern conceptions of *Ummah* include an elite and a popular model. These two models are not necessarily mutually exclusive but their views on the Islamic nation-state are quite divergent. Most Muslim scholars view *Ummah* with a top-down approach articulated within the nation-state model. Al-Ahsan, for example, puts his faith in a rejuvenated Organization of Islamic Countries and to him “the strongest force inhibiting the success of the OIC is the secular concept of national sovereignty” (139). Ali Nawaz Memon envisages a larger alliance of Muslim nation-states and would like to see, besides other things, a united stand by Muslim nation-states on core Muslim issues. He suggests: “If all Muslims, particularly the member governments of OIC, take a firm stand on a vital issue and convince the West that they are ready for any sacrifice, the West will think twice” (224). Even in their top-down approach, both these scholars emphasize the welfare state over its neoliberal counterpart. The socialistic spirit of Islam is inscribed in the Islamic political ideology through the Qur’an, which strongly enforces an ethics of public care, the life of the prophet, and the Muslim cultural production that draws on this heritage. The nation-state model of global Muslim alliance, therefore, relies on sharing the wealth of Muslim countries through the exchange of goods and human labour. Muslim postnationalism is different from its Euro-American neoliberal globalization: it envisages not only free movement of goods but also free movement of people. And as these free-moving people are expected to have equal rights all over the *Darul Islam*, they, therefore, are not exposed to the vagaries of international capital. Thus, the Muslim worker, at least in theory, can neither be exploited within a national landscape by the forces of globalization nor can he/she be exploited as itinerant labour anywhere else in the *Darul Islam*. Certainly, even a cursory glance at the state of exploitation of the migrant Muslim labour in the

oil-rich Arab nation-states is enough to suggest that the postnational Muslim alliances still have a long way to go. But this exploitation is certainly caused by the linkage of Muslim identity to that of a particular nation-state. Thus, the new emphasis on *Ummah* sees a universal Muslim identity as an egalitarian thrust against the stratified economic conditions of the Muslim nation-states.

The popular model has two distinct permutations: the Islamist political parties and the radical underground alliances. As explained earlier, the radical international alliances were formed during the Soviet-Afghan war. As these alliances were formed in a war-like situation against a defined enemy, their mobilizing philosophy relies heavily on the language of war, and the adherents of this ideology see the nation-state as a threat to the popular expression of *Ummah* as a political system. As the international volunteers of the Afghan war returned to their nation-states, they had already built lateral solidarities with Muslims from all over the world, and because of their transnational and egalitarian thrust, the Muslim national elite has always seen them as a threat. It is this tension between the national elite and popular Islamic movements that has forced popular Islamic internationalism to go underground. The current war on terror has further aggravated this situation. Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations are representative examples of these kinds of alliances.

The Islamist political parties are more pragmatic in their approach and aim to alter their national political systems before attempting to reach out and build a modern system of *Ummah*. Highly conservative in their interpretation of the *Shariah*, these movements, surprisingly, are not fiscally conservative. Their emphasis on social welfare and the redemptive functions of the state puts them in conflict with the secular national elite—who mostly rely on neoliberal economics—while constantly increasing their popular appeal. In Pakistan, the two major political parties, *Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam* and *Jamaat-e-Islami*, are two good examples of such Islamist parties. These Islamist parties should not be seen as atavistic or primordialist. Primordial attachment is “one that stems from the ‘givens’ [...] of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices” (Geertz 31). The popular Muslim imaginary of *Ummah*, though certainly based in historical retrieval, is not merely a premordialist movement. It is rather best explained by what Arjun Appadurai calls the “diasporic public spheres” (147). In Appadurai’s explanation, “modern ethnic movements” (and that includes use of religion in defining identity) are tied to the nation-state’s handling of the ethnic conflict (157). Such a group dynamics does not see conflict within a nation-state as a lapse into a primordial mode

but rather as a crisis of modernity itself. The popular Muslim internationalist movement occupies the same kind of place: it relies on a historical juridico-political concept of *Ummah* and then attempts to articulate it through popular politics that are often postnational and in conflict with the interests of the national elite.

Qudsia's novel does not explore these possibilities and stratifications of *Ummah*; it only gives us a crystallized version of the mobilizing myth of flight and a triumphant return. It is the political mobilization of these myths that articulates various permutations of Muslim internationalism. In my opinion, a more practical expression of modern *Ummah* will have to find a compromise between its populist and nation-state model. If an alliance of Muslim nation-states can create a political confederation akin to the European Union, it could work as an alternate political system with enough political weight to challenge global neoliberal imperative.

Whatever the future possibilities, the postnational mythologies of Islam are real and cannot merely be set aside as primordial or non-progressive. As the nation-state fails in its distributive function, Muslims will keep on defining their identities in this global movement of people in a political landscape defined only by a faith in one religion, a good example of which was the Afghan Jihad, and a more grotesque form of which is unfolding in the constant movement of Muslim volunteers to the current *darul-harb*, Iraq. Any global negotiation with Islamic nation-states will, therefore, have to keep this particular aspect of Muslim historical mythology in mind.

At the end of the novel, the buzzard community is banished from the forest. While the buzzards perform their *Hijra*, Qudisa leaves us with a profound message: flight is noble, territory is not holy, and that the nation-state is not the only signifier of modern Muslim identity.

NOTES

1/ All citations from the novel are in my translation.

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